

BERKLEE TASK FORCE MEETING SUMMARY

Tuesday, December 11, 2007

Place: Boston Public Library

Members Present: Susan Ashbrook, Neighborhood Association of the Back Bay; Kelly Brilliant, Fenway Alliance; Meg Mainzer-Cohen, President and Executive Director Back Bay Association; Tim Horn, Fenway Civic Association; Valerie Hunt, Area Resident; Gail Korn, Area Resident; Richard Pendleton, Fenway CDC; Karla Rideout, Fenway Co-operative Resident; Michael Ross, Boston City Councilor; Byron Rushing, Massachusetts State Representative; Ellen Shortell, Neighborhood Association of the Back Bay; Barbara Simons, Acting President Symphony United Neighbors

Attendees: Gerald Autler, Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA); David Hornfischer, Bill Whitney, Jim McCoy and Linda Cole, Berklee College of Music; David Dixon, Goody Clancy; and approximately 25 interested citizens including representatives from St. Cecilia Church, the Christian Science Church and Fenway CDC

Welcome

Karla Rideout called the meeting to order at 6:10 p.m. and welcomed everyone to the Task Force meeting. She introduced Sarah Kelley, Executive Director of the Boston Preservation Alliance, who distributed a 1993 publication entitled *Boston Theatre District*.

Historical Presentation

Sarah Kelley presented historical information related to the State Street Bank building and the Fenway Theater located at the corner of Massachusetts Avenue and Boylston Streets. She discussed preservation conditions for both buildings.

Sarah reported the State Street Bank building was built in 1902 as a branch to serve primarily the Fenway area. State Street Bank was the third bank established in Boston. Advertisements from that time confirmed the bank's opening represented a period of change for the Back Bay. The neo-classical style building experienced many alterations over time to accommodate uses as a post office, restaurant and eventual mixed-use by Berklee College of Music. Berklee currently uses the building for administrative offices

and classrooms.

Fenway Theater was built in 1915 in the classical revival style and its opening coincided with the opening of the nearby subway station. It was the first theater built in the Back Bay and promotional materials detail its operation until 1959. Berklee College of Music purchased the theater in 1972 and upon completing extensive renovations, began using it as the Berklee Performance Center in 1976. Area residents acknowledged the theater would likely have been demolished if Berklee had not purchased the building. Unfortunately, many interior and some exterior features of the building were lost during the years of operation.

Sarah then discussed the possibility of preserving the buildings at the corner of Massachusetts Avenue and Boylston Avenue versus preserving the buildings' façades. She presented slides of other urban buildings in Boston and New York that experienced renovations whereby new construction was integrated with existing structure. Two examples included 125 Summer Street and 101 Arch Street in Boston, which utilized elements of façades and setback to create new street-friendly façades.

Next, Sarah depicted the Paramount Theater and adjacent Arcade building purchased by Emerson College. The interior of the theater along with its historic elements has been completely ruined by years of neglect. The theater was used for film, but upon renovation, Emerson will use it as a performance center. The Arcade building will become a black-box theater and dormitory. Historical items will be displayed in the theater and new technology will integrate the original façade with circular lighting to create a new effect.

Sarah recommended the following four steps in an overall approach to integrate restoration with new construction:

1. Look at massing of a new building, how it relates to the original structure, and consider an appropriate setback.
2. Think about materials and design. (Sarah noted that a design scheme has yet to be developed for the possible Berklee Crossroads project.)
3. Consider connections and boundaries between buildings – including how to move from one building to another
4. Strive to create places of interest and intrigue to draw attention

Gerald Autler suggested that Berklee administrators discuss the parallels in developing the Crossroad project with Emerson College's development and renovation of the Paramount Theater in relation to restoring original architecture.

Following Sarah's presentation, Councilor Ross presented a report encouraging the restoration of residential communities including the Fenway neighborhood. He distributed written information on the *Institutional Expansion in the Fenway* to support

his views (see attached). The information included buildings purchased by Northeastern University and the off-campus residency of full-time college students in the top ten Boston zip codes.

Councilor Ross noted that college many students reside in immediate neighborhoods, but they often do not grow roots in the community. He estimated that 2,00 to 2,700 students live in the Fenway neighborhood, which is also impacted by students from Northeastern University as well as Berklee. (Northeastern University master leases numerous properties in the Fenway area.) Councilor Ross recommends that increasing numbers of students should be housed on local campuses; however, he stated that it is beneficial to include ten percent of students in a surrounding neighborhood.

Councilor Ross stated that Berklee College has informally indicated it may consider the sale of its 98 Hemenway dorm in the future. If and when the college decides to sell the property, he encouraged college administrators to sell the building for residential housing rather than institutional or commercial development. The Councilor noted he had signed a letter from the Task Force that was sent to BRA (Boston Redevelopment Authority) in support of Berklee selling 98 Hemenway for residential use. Gerald Autler stated that the BRA would be interested in future uses of the property if Berklee should divest itself of 98 Hemenway.

Dave Hornfischer explained that Berklee is trying to follow the Mayor's request for colleges and universities to create additional student housing. Berklee's first goal is to find appropriate space for additional student housing. He noted that Berklee may sell 98 Hemenway at some future point, but the College must first meet its additional housing needs. Mr. Hornfischer also stated that Berklee is looking for new dormitory sites in the area rather than converting existing neighborhood housing/apartment properties.

Several citizens expressed concern that too many students live in the surrounding neighborhood. They would prefer to have a population of property owners who vote, pay taxes, and are vested in the future of the neighborhood.

Although colleges and universities are tax-exempt and some do not remit payments in lieu of taxes (PILOT), Councilor Ross acknowledged that Berklee does make PILOT payments to the City of Boston.

Karla Rideout then turned the meeting over to Mr. Hornsfischer.

Berklee Initiatives

Mr. Hornfischer announced that Berklee opened a coffee house in the Tennis and Racquet Club at 939 Boylston Street and the College is seeking its entertainment license for a February start of shows. After extensive interior renovations, this Back Bay building can

provide a great place for students to meet and offer musical programs. Beginning in February, concerts will generally be planned for Thursday through Sunday nights. Meetings and/or programs will be held in the café Monday through Wednesday evenings. The programs will be varied with some of them being offered free of charge. The café is also open to the public and Mr. Hornfischer thanked the Back Bay neighborhood for its support of this endeavor.

Mr. Hornfischer stated that Berklee closed on the purchase of Jack's Drum Shop at 1096 Boylston Street. Future use of the building is still under study. Berklee's goal is to control a number of buildings along that portion of Boylston Street and to improve the existing streetscape and sidewalk.

Regarding Berklee's IMPNF (Institutional Master Plan Notification Form), Mr. Hornfischer noted that Berklee listened to the concerns of Task Force members. After consideration of several new possible site opportunities, the College decided to postpone filing its IMPNF. Accordingly, Berklee is pursuing alternative property acquisitions, which include submitting a bid for the St. Cecilia lot. Berklee administrators met with officials from the Catholic Church and presented "before and after" renderings for the proposed site and the St. Cecilia streetscape. College administrators also reported that they were committed to improving Berklee's recycling storage on St. Cecilia Street. If the college is successful in gaining control of the St. Cecilia church site and/or some other site opportunities it is considering, the program for the Berklee Crossroads project could change. Mr. Hornfischer asked the Task Force and individuals/organizations represented to write letters in support of Berklee's bid to purchase the St. Cecilia site.

Councilor Ross noted that Berklee is interested in creating a campus environment and needs community support. David Dixon agreed with Councilor Ross and told Task Force members that their support could be valuable in the College's attempt to purchase the St. Cecilia site. Numerous Task Force members then expressed interest in circulating a letter of support for Berklee's attempt to purchase the site.

In addition, Mr. Hornfischer explained that Church officials indicated Berklee was further along in its goals for use of the site than commercial developers. Berklee is interested in constructing a building that would fit with the neighborhood context. The College believes it would be good neighbor as it shares many social values with its neighbors.

Following Mr. Hornfischer's presentation, Task Force members discussed the benefits of submitting a letter of support for Berklee's bid to purchase the St. Cecilia site. Tim Hunt noted this is a good opportunity for Berklee and it would also help the Fenway neighborhood. Councilor Ross responded that he had issues with the height of Berklee's proposed Crossroads project; however, if Berklee could purchase the St. Cecilia site, that could relieve pressure for a 35-story building.

Bill Whitney explained that Berklee would not propose a 35-story building if it could erect a building on the St. Cecilia site. He agreed that Berklee would share architectural renderings with the Task Force regarding a proposed building if the College purchases this property.

Following a brief discussion, Councilor Ross made a motion which was seconded and unanimously:

VOTED: The Community Task Force would write a letter to support an effort of Berklee College of Music to purchase the St. Cecilia site on Boylston Street to better distribute height and massing of the proposed corner project in an effort to increase student housing.

As a result of Councilor Ross's motion and the unanimous vote, Karla Rideout stated that the Community Task Force would submit a letter of support to the Catholic Church in the near future.

Discussion ensued regarding the next meeting date. Gerald Autler noted that meetings had been held on Tuesdays, but alternate days could be considered in the future. It was agreed that members would coordinate the next meeting date via e-mail. Once a date is set, members and representatives will be notified. It was agreed that since Berklee was entering a new phase of its process, the January meeting would be cancelled. The date for a February meeting will be set once it is clear that Berklee has something new to report. (The February meeting was subsequently cancelled.)

The meeting was adjourned at 8:00 p.m.

Prepared by Linda Cole, Berklee College of Music